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History

Paper 1G (AS) Additional Specimen Question

Paper

Question 02 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

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## Specimen Answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

### Paper 1G (AS): Additional Specimen question paper

**02** 'The British economy was in a much worse condition in 1900 than it had been in 1870.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

[25 marks]

#### Student response

In terms of the economy the agricultural sector was suffering more severely than the industry sector in 1900 so in answer to the question, I would to a large extent agree with the statement due to the following reasons; competition from abroad was becoming more fierce, Britain was not technologically advancing and keeping up, the management of businesses were not responding to the demands needed to be met due to new changes and the depression in the agricultural sector had a severe effect.

Firstly, the competition Britain began to face by the late 19th century was starting to become a big problem. In 1870 Britain was the largest trading nation in the world, however after a successful 'boom' period from 1851-1873, the British economy began to slow down. By 1900 they had been overtaken in the rankings by Germany and the USA. The USA particularly began to make a mark on the industrialising world as they had an enormous mound of natural resources and a growing labour force due to increasing immigration. For example from 1870-1913 the USA industrial output (% per annum) was 4.7 where as Britain's was only 2.1 this shows just how much America was beginning to move ahead in the market than Britain was. Germany and the USA were also becoming more powerful due to the fact they were had introduced tariffs on to their imported goods, this meant that Britain's market share decreased in some industries. Britain on the other hand still hadn't introduced tariffs due to the strong belief in laissez-faire that was still widely accepted at the time, in 1860 nearly all tariffs had been removed and Britain could call itself a free trading nation, this at the time had led to a massive increase in the volume of trade and provided a stimulus for economic growth, but by the late 19th century because Germany, the USA and other countries had introduced tariffs this economic doctrine was no longer as successful as it had been previously. By 1900 Joseph Chamberlain finally realised that if Britain was to remain dominate in a world which had turned to economic protection then the British industry would have to adopt some forms of protection in order to reduce the growing problem of cheap imports of government-subsidised producers abroad.

Secondly, Britain had begun to experience problems of being the first nation to industrialise; the machinery they were using was old and obsolete in comparison to other countries such as America and Germany who could start with the latest more advanced technology. As a country they weren't putting in enough effort to improve designs and reduce costs by introducing the latest machinery which might have enabled them to hold on to their European and American markets but as the management were too complacent they preferred to repair old machinery rather than invest their profits in new premises and equipment, however this lack of investment could be explained by the falling profits so less willingness to invest is understandable. For example the Germans installed Siemens furnaces for making steel and they had also adopted the Gilchrist-Thomas methods from 1878 in which they managed to manufacture steel from iron-ore which had a high phosphorous

content. Britain on the other hand still ran the Bessemer converters from 1856 which were much more expensive to run than the methods the Germans had adopted. Lots of other advances were being made in other industries as well for example Belgium had made progress in the glass industry where they began to produce better quality, glass more cheaply than Britain, this meant that they were taking British consumers who would've previously had to buy from England as prior to this time it was the main source of products and the 'workshop of the world'. Although Britain was lagging behind in 'new' industries, it could be argued that wasn't such a bad thing because it meant they could take advantage of other countries developing products by introducing the more efficient and advanced techniques after they had been developed abroad by trial and error.

Another issue which came about towards the end of 1800 was that people weren't putting in enough effort to develop new industries so this led to the result of British export trade relying too heavily on a few staple products such as coal, textiles, iron and shipbuilding this meant that there was a lack of variety for the products being produced and a scarcity therefore of production facilities to produce more alternative products. Although by 1900 they had kept a wide lead in these industrial sectors, the Germans for example were surging ahead in 'new' more advanced and popular industries such as electrical engineering, chemicals and dyestuffs, if Britain was to retain its dominance in the trading world then inevitably they would've also had to develop these industries but unfortunately they did not. Britain also paid too little attention to the importance of science especially in the industries such as chemical and electrical engineering so they had far less of an edge in these areas, this meant that Germany's power in these sectors became much more influential and dominating. German imports therefore also began to increase and the size of the trade gap which began to occur after 1870 began to get larger, but despite all of this London remained the financial capital of the world and its dominance was unchallenged in this area. However there was a low rate of investment after 1870 which is essential to economic growth and prosperity, even when people were prepared to invest, industrialists made the completely wrong decisions for example from 1896 there was boom in cotton exports so hundreds of new mills were built in Lancashire but instead of investing their money into the new latest automatic looms, which were used in Germany and the USA, they decided to invest in the traditional types of looms, this slowed down production and made production much more expensive, alternatively it could be argued they stuck to these traditional machines as trade unions had been trying to slow down the introduction of new machines and processes in an attempt to make sure that skilled workers were not pushed out of their jobs.

Finally, the economic decline was much more noticeable in the agricultural sector. After bad harvests in 1873 due to a wet summer, and the autumn of 1875 which was exceptionally wet came 12 years afterwards of above average rainfall and below average temperatures this meant that crops were ruined and harvests were disappointing. Therefore the number of people employed in agriculture fell dramatically from 1.6million in 1871 to 1.3 million by 1901. This bad weather also helped spread pneumonia and foot and mouth disease amongst livestock so farmers suffered huge losses. Another reason for the depression was partially down to Disraeli's government, this is because despite the immense pressure put on them they took the decision not to protect British agriculture by introducing tariffs, and this meant that by the 1880s for example, the introduction of refrigeration ships had brought competition for things such as frozen mutton from Australia and New Zealand. The most important cause however of the depression was due to cheap foreign imports which were now available to make up for the shortages of products being able to be produced. The building of the transcontinental railways opened up the fertile prairies of North America as vast wheat-growing areas and then the development of large merchant steamships meant that countries such as America could transport wheat swiftly and cheaply to Britain. Before 1870 the percentage of imported wheat consumed in Britain was around 50%, this then rose to 70% after 1870, the British wheat prices also

nearly halved between 1867 and 1898 which shows how economic decline was very prominent in this economic sector. The results of this depression meant that farmers for example who relied heavily on wheat and cereal growing had a hard time as huge reductions in profits occurred and many went bankrupt, although some managed to survive by turning arable land over to pasture and switching from crops to livestock, dairy, poultry and market farming, many still suffered tremendous losses. On the flip side this depression brought about the benefit of cheaper food so people who were lucky enough to have jobs could enjoy a slightly higher standard of living and any agricultural labourers who remained had the benefit that although lower prices meant that their money wages fell; their real wages stayed steady.

In conclusion, the British economy was in a much worse condition in 1900 than it had been in 1870. The agricultural sector suffered much more severely though than the industrial sector as Britain still remained dominant in most traditional staple industries, but in other areas such as chemical engineering they were lagging seriously behind other countries such as Germany and America. This increased competition from abroad became even worse when other countries began to introduce tariffs but Britain did not due to the strong belief of laissez-faire at the time. They were also facing problems of having industrialised first as they had old machinery which was much less efficient than other competitors, Britain had also not made enough effort to develop new industries and the lack of investment had catastrophic results as even when they did invest they invested wrongly, but despite all this London did remain the financial capital of the world. Also due to poor harvests, increased competition from abroad and Disraeli's government the agricultural sector suffered severely and the 'golden age' of agriculture ended dramatically. Finally in terms of whether there was a depression overall, the statistics and facts would indicate that the economy merely slowed down rather than went into a depression.

#### **Commentary – Level 4**

The answer clearly shows an understanding of the demands of the question, although the conclusion undermines this somewhat by suggesting that the issue was one of depression or not, which is not the same as 'worse or not'. Students must be careful not to write answers based on questions that have been set with a slightly different focus. The answer has considerable range and covers most of the material required to make an assessment. Understanding of the cycle of industrialisation is particularly relevant.

Expression is occasionally less than fully clear and tends towards generalisation: was it really the case that Britain showed no interest in new technologies, and the difference between imports and exports is not always maintained. These points apart, this is an effective response undermined principally by a tendency to generalisation. It would be placed in mid-Level 4.